

WSU grad Kathryn House to launch Sequence Winery in Idaho

By [Eric Degerman](#) on June 27, 2014

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Kathryn House, who graduated from Washington State University, will launch Sequence Winery this fall in Caldwell, Idaho. She served as assistant winemaker at acclaimed Betz Family Winery in Woodinville, Wash., for four years before moving in 2010 to Boise to start a family. (Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

CALDWELL, Idaho — Kathryn House started off in one of Oregon's top vineyards and worked early on for acclaimed Washington winemakers [Bob Betz](#) and [Jean-François Pellet](#), and now the timing seems right for Idaho's Master of Wine candidate to launch her own brand — [Sequence Winery](#).

And House, a Washington State University graduate, will immediately make her mark with [Fraser Vineyard](#) fruit as she recently signed a five-year contract that locks up perhaps the Snake River Valley's most prized block for Cabernet Sauvignon.



“When my husband and I decided to make that big jump, Fraser was the first vineyard that I thought of, so to come in and make it our flagship vineyard is really special,” House told Great Northwest Wine.

Sequence Winery will release a few barrels’ worth of wine later this year, but House plans to produce 1,200 cases from the 2014 vintage as Idaho has grown to more than 50 wineries. The focus of Sequence will be Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Chardonnay and dry Riesling, with the Cab coming off the 3.7-acre site that helped grower-winemaker Bill Fraser and his wife, Bev, turn Fraser Vineyard into [Wine Press Northwest's 2011 Idaho Winery of the Year](#). However, the Frasers divorced last year and Bev received the vineyard and the winery as part of the settlement. Bill no longer is part of the Idaho wine industry.

“When Fraser Vineyard went through a change of ownership last year, I was there as someone who could help consult for them, and I was there to work with Bev,” House said. “She asked me to help her because she now had the winery and wanted to continue that legacy a bit. I was brought in to help preserve that. Last year, we helped blend up and finish up some of the wines, and I worked out a trade for some of the grapes.”

House leaves Woodinville for Boise in 2010

House and her husband, Dan, chose Boise to be their home because of the opportunities for him to pursue his career as a physician in a community where they would start their family, enjoy the outdoors and become a part of an emerging wine industry.

“He had spent a year in Boise finishing up a residency and really loved it, and I had come to visit Boise and had a great time,” House said. “I’d really never spent a lot of time in Idaho. The people were friendly. The cost of living was great. There were wonderful recreation activities — it was half an hour to ski. It was a little bit of a utopia in some ways. He got offered a chief residency job, and we thought, ‘We’ll spend a year here and give it a try,’ and that turned into three-year stint. I knew at that time I was going to put my career on the back burner.”

When they arrived in 2010, it wouldn’t be long before their son Kellen was born. (No, he was not named for the famous Boise State University quarterback.) House also took over an existing wine analysis business, which she transformed into the [House of Wine](#), a wine education, consulting and lab service company at the 44th Street Winemakers Co-op in Garden City.

“One of the clients that I did some laboratory work and consulting for was Fraser,” House said. “I remember moving here and saying, ‘Oh gosh, it’s too cold. Why would people grow Cabernet

Sauvignon here?’ I had not tasted it yet, but when I tasted Fraser’s, and I went, ‘Huh, this fruit is really good.’ It made me stop and think.”

Williamson family to manage Fraser Vineyard



Mike Williamson of Williamson Orchards and Vineyards in Caldwell, Idaho, will manage the plantings at Fraser Vineyard this year. (Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

Mike Williamson, who manages orchards and vineyards for [his multi-generation farming family in Caldwell](#), enters his second year of managing the vines at Fraser Vineyard. This year marks the start of his five-year contract with Sequence Winery as vineyard manager.

“We live so close to the vineyard, and I’ve watched it grow up,” Williamson said with a smile. “I’ve always admired it as the ‘grass is greener’ story. I would talk with Bill and give him some advice on the things we were doing, so when the opportunity came up for Williamson Vineyards to work with a quality site like this, we had to jump at it. I was pretty excited because of the reputation of the wine. I’ve tasted some of the Fraser wines and really like them.”

Sequence Winery moves into Idaho incubator

House, 34, will make the Sequence wines and operate the House of Wine lab in Caldwell. Her landlord is Jim Toomey, director of the [Agri-Business Incubator for the University of Idaho](#).

“We think we’re the only place in the country that has food and wine incubation going on at the same site,” Toomey said. “I’ve been watching Washington and Oregon, and you’ve got wine incubation going on all over the place, but we have the food and wine.”



Fraser Vineyard was first planted in 2003, and the wines from the 2,600-foot-elevation site in the Snake River Valley helped it to earn Wine Press Northwest’s Idaho Winery of Year in 2011. (Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

The University of Idaho’s College of Agriculture took over the complex created by a federal program in 1999, however the school didn’t begin to recruit small businesses until Toomey’s arrival in 2002. [Fujishin Family Cellars](#) was the first winery occupant in 2009 before moving to the Sunny Slope. [Hat Ranch Winery](#) and [Vale Wine Co.](#), both owned by Tim and Dr. Helen Harless, will continue to handle their production at the incubator. They soon will be joined by [Périple Winery](#).

“Presumably we’re going to be a full capacity here for the first time ever this summer,” Toomey said. “We’ve talked about being able to expand the capacity over the course of time.”

It is convenient for winemakers, but its location across Chicago Street from the Treasure Valley Livestock Auction is not wine country. And while wineries are permitted to stage trade tastings and private events on incubator property, they may not operate public tasting rooms.

“We will allow for the tastings by the restaurant (trade) and the (wine) club members and those sorts of things, but these guys aren’t around here full-time, so we don’t want the RVs here like Prosser where you come in off the interstate,” Toomey said. “We don’t want to handle that, nor do we want to handle the liability of it. We want either Kat’s model or do like Tim and Helen — where the tasting room is at their place (on the Sunny Slope) — where you get to the country or get to the city with the wine. The tasting here is only educationally related, for your restaurant customers or your wine club.”

The incubator concept fits well for Sequence Winery, House said.

“From a wine-production standpoint with Sequence, when I started thinking about my company and where I wanted to be, I wanted to be at a place where I’m close to those vineyards and still make it efficient,” House said. “I’m lucky that there happens to be a couple of other wineries already here, Hat Ranch/Vale and Periple, so there’s a camaraderie that happens because you are in the same space. But at the same time we each have our own location, so we get to make wines our own way, but we also don’t duplicate pieces of equipment if we choose not to.”

Fraser Vineyard fruit will be focus of Sequence Winery



Bev Fraser, left, has entered into five-year lease on Fraser Vineyard with Sequence winemaker Kathryn House. Sierra Laverty, Fraser's granddaughter, will continue to work in the vineyard until she returns this fall to Oregon State University's viticulture program. (Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

The critical ingredient of Sequence Winery will be Cabernet Sauvignon from Fraser Vineyard, especially with all the red varieties grow in the Snake River Valley being in such short supply. Historically, the vineyard produces only 300 to 600 cases, depending upon the vintage, but House is optimistic that with her background in viticulture and Williamson's expertise, they can double production in a few years.

"Let's see what we can do to make Idaho really shine, to preserve that asset of Fraser Vineyard and make it even better," House said.

While there are no new wines being released under the Fraser Vineyard brand, House has hired Bev's granddaughter Sierra Laverty, 22, to continue working on the family vines this summer before she returns to Oregon State University for her senior year in the viticulture program. And expect to see Bev at some wine functions in the Snake River Valley from time to time.

“I still have a little connection to the industry,” Fraser said. “I can stay involved and can still be representative of Fraser Vineyard — that’s what I’m hoping.”

House doesn’t stand still as winemaking mother



Kathryn House has signed a five-year lease for award-winning Fraser Vineyard to make it the flagship fruit source for her new Sequence Winery brand this fall in Caldwell, Idaho. (Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

The name for House’s winery didn’t come quickly, yet it seems natural.

“I’m a little bit of a Type A personality,” House said. “I like things in a little bit of an order, and I do think that life as itself has an order. It’s not always an order that we expect, but there’s an order in all different ways. That’s an order in how grapes ripen and how wine is made — a sequence. There are poetic sequences, there are mathematical sequences, there are artistic sequences, and to me sequence is a great way to build all that together,” she said with smile.

An infectious chaotic charisma surrounds House, who grew up in Santa Rosa, Calif., as an only child and a self-proclaimed “4-H geek.” Two of the biggest influences in her winemaking career appeared on her horizon not long after she left Washington State University’s vaunted veterinarian program — she’d already earned degrees in zoology and Spanish — to pursue a master’s degree in horticulture.

First, there was an internship at Seven Hills Vineyard and Pepper Bridge Winery working with Pellet. Next, she got her foot in the door at Betz Family Winery, where an internship soon turned into four years as assistant winemaker for Bob Betz — a Master of Wine.

“People thought I was crazy, and some people still do for having moved from Woodinville,” House said. “I couldn’t imagine a better employer than Bob, and I’ve been lucky to work with people who are not just employers but great mentors and people who I’d still say are mentors I’m lucky to call colleagues and friends now.”

Betz also inspired her to apply for the Masters of Wine program, and House was accepted while she was carrying Kellen. Her next step comes with an exam in the next few days.

“There are less than 325 Masters of Wine in the world, and the pass rate I think is about 7 percent, so it’s a pretty daunting exam,” House said. “The ability to pass that exam and then be living in Idaho and be able to say that I am not only an educator but that I choose to make wine here is compelling. And there’s a reason for that. It says a lot about this region. Idaho is very different and I like that.”



Kathryn House stands in Fraser Vineyard with her husband, Dr. Dan McClaskey, son Kellen, and daughter Mia. (Photo by Laurie Pearman/Courtesy of Sequence Winery)

Snake River Valley suits 'city mouse, country mouse'

Unlike many winemakers in the Snake River Valley, the move to Idaho was not a homecoming for House.

"My husband, Dan, says I'm a country mouse and he's a city mouse, so for us, Boise is great," House said. "He doesn't want to live out in the country, and I'm 30 minutes from my winemaking facility and 45 minutes from the vineyard.

"Anybody with small kids knows that 30-minute drive is nothing, when there's no traffic, it's just time to yourself. And I don't get much of that," she added with a smile. "We've had an opportunity to move back to Oregon and Washington, but we feel at home here, and grapes here are beautiful, and the winemakers here have made beautiful wines."

It's also given her another connection to her father, who would take along on field trips to tasting rooms and wineries Sonoma and Napa, and who still makes a barrel of wine for family celebration each year in his basement.

"In 50 years, if I look back and I've got a glass of wine on my porch and I'm thinking, 'Wow, there are 200 great wineries in this state and I got to be a part of that from early on,' then to me that job is done," she said. "I think we're all here to support that industry and to create that lifestyle that we want, and make that connection from agriculture to home."